

Memorandum



Date: January 12, 2005

To: Honorable Sally A. Heyman, Chairperson and Members
Intergovernmental, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Committee

From: George W. Burgess
County Manager

IRCA
Agenda Item No.
7 (D)

Subject: The Gallery at African Heritage Cultural Arts Center

This report is presented pursuant to a request by Commissioner Dennis C. Moss at the October 27, 2004 meeting of the Recreation and Cultural Affairs Committee.

The African Heritage Cultural Arts Center has a nearly thirty-year history of teaching, preserving and promulgating the arts of the African Diaspora. An integral part of this multidisciplinary facility is The Gallery, a space dedicated to the presentation of art exhibits of the highest quality, which integrates community involvement with the exhibition of national and international exhibitions of art reflective of the culture and artists of the African Diaspora. The African Heritage Cultural Arts Center is about continuous achievement, growth, new opportunities and servicing the immediate community, being sensitive to its mission but also opening its doors to tourism and broader segments of Miami-Dade County. To that end, it is the goal of the Park and Recreation Department to establish the Gallery as one of Miami's premiere exhibition spaces, and Florida's important cultural destinations.

The Gallery has specific objectives that include:

- The development of an inspiring shared vision through an inclusive process which reflects the aspirations of the African Heritage Cultural Center and the distinctive arts practices and programs universal arts community;
- Involvement of community diverse artists of African descent and cultures working in a range of disciplines through commissions and projects, and the successful delivery of artworks fit for purpose;
- An exciting, dynamic, playful, extraordinary and coherent Gallery experience for first time visitors and regular visitors alike: a destination which people want to visit, return to, and get involved in. Stability of the space as it forges towards becoming one of South Florida's important spaces for African-American art;
- The integration of diverse communities in the Gallery as a place where dialogue can occur about commonalities and distinctions among subcultures;
- The development of a structure for an ongoing program of arts projects that ensures continual refreshment of the experience, and involves collaboration between artists and diverse community and outside groups;
- Professional and community evaluations of all Gallery projects, commissions and development activities that result in recommendations to its management to result in best practices in its field.

Annual exhibitions are selected by staff and presented to and approved by a panel of distinguished visual arts professionals. Past and future exhibits represent emerging and established community and national artists, introduce the community to new and different types of art, and feature diverse exhibits representing cultures, styles, techniques, and mediums. In selecting the exhibits and the participating artists, it is always an objective to successfully integrate community needs and desires with education, cultural awareness and progress. Each exhibition is evaluated for the potential to include education, historical, scientific and architectural activities to ensure integration of overall visitor experience.

Most recently, The Gallery was featured as one of the spaces to visit during the international Art Basel event, had renowned interdisciplinary and installation artist Homer Jackson in residence, and served as the space for one of this community's largest assimilations of art by community artists. The Gallery's success is also premised upon its enhanced visibility at other visual arts spaces, conferences, and curatorial workshops. Its role is especially important as a visual advocate for and on behalf of the diverse African Diaspora arts experiences found within and outside of the Miami-Dade community.

Other roles of The Gallery include developing a portfolio of arts projects and commissions which lead to the development of artworks in diverse forms for the Gallery, including facilitating audience/user participation, artists and audience involvement in workshops, seminars, discussions, and community dialogue and educational forums. The Gallery also makes a significant contribution to the distinctive visual and integrated arts programs of the Center by encouraging the students to participate in its many activities or by simply using the works as a focal point for encouraging the creative process.

In 2004, the Gallery presented a six-workshop series for African-American and other community artists and art collectors. Workshop topics included: "Collecting African-American Art," "Copyrights for the Visual Artists," "How to be selected for Art In Public Places Projects," "Fellowships for the Individual Artists," and "How to Negotiate Contracts and Representation with Galleries."

Programmatically, The Gallery offers key activities for community, professional and student involvement including: artists' talks, family workshops, and other programs that integrate exhibits, artists and visual arts experiences with other multidisciplinary activities. The integrated arts experience within the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center is an essential additional component to the development of both the Gallery and its Lobby Gallery, where things to and how they fit together and collaboration to ensure that the artistic vision is maintained and consistent with the Center. An essential component of the Gallery's role within the Center is to establish and curate programs/projects/exhibitions that lead to the creation of artwork which inhabits the Gallery space but which also builds on and contributes to the integrated arts program of the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center.

The Gallery is also the catalyst for other projects including an annual community arts festival and the monthly Village Marketplace that is a haven for community artists to network and exhibit, and visitors to commission, view and purchase their work and the Jazz and Poetry by Candlelight Open Mike series for writers and poets with live musical accompaniment.

The 2004 exhibition season included:

“Three Women”

Eszter Gyory, Vickie Pierre and Hermine Ricketts
March 5th – March 27th, 2004

An exhibition featuring the multimedia works of local artists, Eszter Gyory (African-American), Vickie Pierre (Haitian-American) and Hermine Ricketts (Jamaican-American) that explored the roles of women from a cultural and social perspective.

“Children of Children”

Photographs by Michael Nye
May 20th – July 30, 2004

An interactive exhibit of more than fifty photographs of multigenerational family members impacted by the social, educational and financial impact of teen and early childbearing. Each photograph was accompanied by a recorded audio impact statement from the subject to which the viewer could listen. The exhibit was viewed by 600+ people from social services and educational programs located throughout the County.

“Praise House”

August 8th – September 22, 2004

“Praise House” revisited the theme of culture and religion in the African-American community and culture. It explored the traditions and happenings of the early Black church in America and the experiences that have shaped them. The show itself featured the work of local painters, photographers, set designers, sculptors, film and video artists and costume designers.

Onofre Frias

“Offerings”

October 8, 2004 – January 14, 2005

Mr. Frias is an artist who has exhibited worldwide. His mixed media work combines his Venezuelan heritage with his African ancestry, which is very much present in all his work.

2005 exhibits include:

January 15 - February 17, 2005

Nigerian Terracottas

From the collection of the Black Heritage Museum

These African clay sculptures were first discovered in 1943 when tin mining operations started near the village of Nok on the Jos Plateau, Nigeria. Since then numerous finds of sculpted terracotta heads, figures, animals, as well as pottery shards, have been discovered in a number of sites over a large part of Nigeria, extending 500 km east to west and 300 north to south. They are collectively known as Nok terracottas, for the village by which the first finds were made.

In 1943 there were no archaeologists working in Nigeria and art historians catalogued the finds. Today, following more modern and accurate excavations, we know that the terracottas date back to a period from 500 BCE to 200 CE. Unfortunately, several figures have appeared on the international art market from clandestine digs for which corroborative data is scarce.

February 25 - March 25, 2005

Three Women

Featuring Nao Tanaka, Benedicte Blanc Fontaine, Jeannie Thomas

April 3 - May 19, 2005

Annual Oscar Thomas Exhibition

(Curated by Kuumba Artists Association)

This aggregate exhibit of multimedia works by community and regional artists/members of the artists collective, "Kuumba Artists Association" celebrates the visual arts legacy of one of South Florida's most prolific artists, the late Oscar Thomas. Thomas, who died a few years ago, for over a decade used his art to convey pressing social and political issues in the community and abroad. His murals and portraits still dot the community on buildings to many works held in private collections. His portrait of the late County Manager Dewey W. Knight hangs in the lobby of the Stephen P. Clark Government Center. His mural capturing the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King is prominently displayed on the corner of NW 62nd Street and 7th Avenue. His more cheerful artwork can be seen everywhere in Miami, from Overtown, Little Havana, downtown, to Opa Locka. Everyone loved him and respected his role and work as an artist who captured and retained Miami's history in paint.

May 15 - June 20, 2005

A New Order

Featuring work by students of African descent from the New World School of the Arts

The visual and media artists of the New World School of the Arts are renowned in the arts world for their innovative approach to creating work and the maturing to artistic vision that exceeds most artists of their youth. These young artists go on to distinguished careers at some of the world's most prestigious arts schools including University of Maryland College of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Pratt Institute, the Whitney Museum, Harlem Studio of Artists and others. This exhibit represents a great opportunity to capture the vision and talent of Miami's own "homegrown" artists before they venture out into the world.

July 15 – August 15, 2005

African Heritage Summer Workshop Student Show

The Gallery will show the best of the multimedia works created by the students in the Summer Arts Workshop Program. The children in the workshop range in age from six to sixteen. The mediums displayed will include textiles, oil and acrylic painting, pen and ink, pottery and ceramics.

September 5 – October 20, 2005

Work by Onajide Shabaka

Onajide Shabaka is a nationally renowned artist who hails from our community. As his statement indicates, his works emerge from a personal commitment to "find a sense of legitimacy and value" in an area that does not fit neatly into the average perception of arts creation but, rather, exposes its viewers to art as a view of a holistic world. Onajide Shabaka, who has pursued a unique vision of not just an artistic practice but also a comprehensive artistic life. Mr. Shabaka has exhibited in many galleries including the Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida; Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC; "Southern Roots: South Florida Invitational", Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, FL; "Next Generation", Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, LA; Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, FL; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH; "Assembly Line", Dorsch Gallery, Miami, FL; "Seraphic Light," Montpelier, VT.


Assistant County Manager